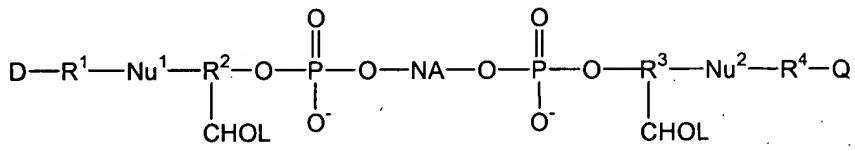
Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1-49. (Canceled)

50. (Previously presented) A probe nucleic acid having the formula:



wherein,

CHOL is a cholesterol derivative;

R^1, R^2, R^3 and R^4 are linker moieties independently selected from the group consisting of substituted or unsubstituted alkyl and substituted or unsubstituted heteroalkyl;

Nu^1 and Nu^2 are members independently selected from the group consisting of nucleotide residues and nucleoside residues;

NA is a nucleic acid sequence;

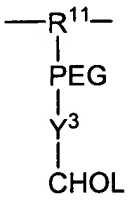
D is a donor of light energy; and

Q is a quencher of light energy,

wherein the CHOL moieties interact to bring D and Q into operative proximity, thereby enabling transfer of energy from D to Q, and

wherein said probe nucleic acid sequence is not hybridized to a target nucleic acid.

51. (Previously presented) The probe nucleic acid according to claim 50, wherein R^2-CHOL and R^3-CHOL are independently selected and have structures according to the formula:



wherein,

R^{11} is a member selected from the group consisting of substituted or unsubstituted alkyl and substituted or unsubstituted heteroalkyl;

PEG is polyethylene glycol;

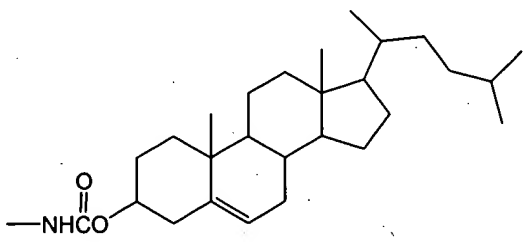
Y^3 is an organic functional group adjoining said PEG to said CHOL.

52. (Previously presented) The probe nucleic acid according to claim 51, wherein said PEG has from about 2 to about 20 ethylene glycol subunits.

53. (Previously presented) The probe nucleic acid according to claim 51 in which R^{11} is substituted or unsubstituted alkyl.

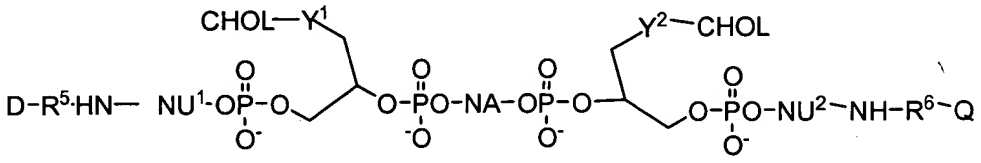
54. (Previously presented) The probe nucleic acid according to claim 53, wherein R^{11} is C_1-C_6 substituted or unsubstituted alkyl.

55. (Previously presented) The probe nucleic acid according to claim 51, wherein Y^3-CHOL has the structure:



56. (Previously presented) The probe nucleic acid according to claim 50, wherein Nu^1 and Nu^2 are nucleotides having an exocyclic amine group to which $-R^1-D$ and $-R^4Q$ are attached, respectively.

57. (Previously presented) A probe nucleic acid having the formula:



wherein,

NA is a nucleic acid sequence;

Nu^1 and Nu^2 are members independently selected from the group consisting of nucleotide residues and nucleoside residues;

Y^1 and Y^2 are linking groups independently selected from the group consisting of substituted or unsubstituted alkyl and substituted or unsubstituted heteroalkyl;

R^5 and R^6 are linking groups independently selected from the group consisting of substituted or unsubstituted alkyl and substituted or unsubstituted heteroalkyl;

D is a donor of light energy; and

Q is a quencher of light energy,

wherein each CHOL interacts with the other CHOL to bring D and Q into operative proximity, thereby enabling transfer of energy from D to Q, and

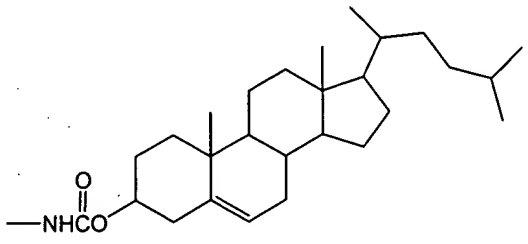
wherein said probe nucleic acid sequence is not hybridized to a target nucleic acid.

58. (Previously presented) The probe nucleic acid according to claim 57, wherein Y^1 and Y^2 are members independently selected from substituted or unsubstituted heteroalkyl.

59. (Previously presented) The probe nucleic acid according to claim 58, wherein Y^1 and Y^2 are polyethylene glycol.

60. (Previously presented) The probe nucleic acid according to claim 59, wherein said polyethylene glycol has from about 2 to about 20 ethylene glycol subunits.

61. (Previously presented) The probe nucleic acid according to claim 57, wherein Y^1-CHOL and Y^2-CHOL have the structure:



62. (Canceled)